Stuck

“Shit!” A quick gasp and my day begins. Entangled in blankets, I struggle for freedom and instead land on my sorry, lazy ass. I am late…again. And this time, I have a feeling that Dean may not be quite so understanding. While it is more than true that my boyfriend controls his frustrations more than anyone else I’ve ever met, past lives included, he does have one pet peeve: tardiness, and unfortunately it was a sin I tend to be guilty of.

I continue to frantically fight my cocoon: a burrito of blankets containing nothing but warmth, happiness, comfort, and my own ensnared body.

“Bev!” Barbara screeches.

I flinch as I glance towards the beast I awoke. Barb and I met in the same English class freshman year and bonded over a shared passion for Victoria Holt’s writing. The idea of a real woman standing up and acting for herself floored us. Anna Brett was a true heroine and one that both of us aim to be. However, over the past two years Barb and I had come to realize literature was the only thing we had in common.

“Shut your mouth unless you can tell me where my moccasins are. I’m late,” I shoot across the room with a look equal to a thousand piercing needles.

“They’re poking out from under your bed, stupid,” she spits, falling back into her pillows dramatically with an audible exhale.

I continue to whirl about the room and finally stumble upon my closet. I pull aside the doors and immediately reach for the dress, with a springtime flower pattern and large bell sleeves. Dean always said it was his favorite dress on me, the pale green accenting the green in my own hazel eyes. I only wear it at times when it’s of utmost importance to charm him, since the pattern makes me feel five years old. I next reach for the vest Dean and I purchased at a flea market that matched my way-too-worn moccasins perfectly. I have found my comfy median.

My brunette mane twirls around and I spot the clock. 10:57. I was expected to be at our spot in negative two minutes. Seeing as this is impossible since the time had passed, plus I live off campus, I consider giving Dean a quick call. Even as I think it, I know it’s a bad idea. Dean is always on time, so I know he won’t answer. The last thing I need is one of his goofy dorm mates slowing me up.

Instead, I sprint out the door and down our two flights of stairs to leave my home with a swift bang of the door. I don’t hesitate as I hit the concrete. Running and I are no strangers, but rather best friends. She keeps me in tip top shape while I keep her on her tip top toes.

Five blocks to campus, add a mad dash at the very end to Dean and our favorite coffee spot. I realize running and I have our job cut out for us. “One. Two. Three. Four,” I count the blocks off as I pass the scenery I know so well. In the five blocks so many little things holding such great value fly by. I feel like a tiny bit of myself is hiding in each one. This is my home.

I hop a short chain-link fence to hustle over a field to where I hope my knight in shining armor will still be waiting. This stretch always feels the longest. Not only am I tuckered out, but I know that walking actually wouldn’t make much of a time difference. The pull in the back of my legs forces me forward: maybe if I can run fast enough, I would leave that pain behind in the dust, along with everything in my past I have beaten.

I hit the concrete again. I know my future cannot be more than three steps, two stairs, and a leap away. I take the stairs in one giant bound and hurl myself into the “Push” sign located directly above the metal bar one is supposed to aim for.

I slide to a halt, right on past the neon yellow “Caution: Wet Floor” and breathe for the first time since I left the house. I immediately spot the brown, shaggy head that makes my heart pound. He reaches out his tender hand to pass over a couple of coins to the cashier. Firmly grasping the coffee, he turns, spots me, and smiles.

“I’m so sorry,” the words slur together as they exit in one short pant. He hands over the coffee.

“I have a confession,” Dean sighs. “I lied. The protest doesn’t actually start until noon.” The smirk on his face leads to a swift punch in the bicep from my clenched hand.

“You brat. A whole hour, really? You need to have some faith in your girlfriend,” I chuckle as guilt slips to the ground, a weight lifted from my shoulders. A couple days ago Dean had told me that the rally started at eleven leading to my mad dash through the school. What a waste of breath.

He hands me the cup with a sincere smile and forced, faux apology while shifting his other arm to wrap around my shoulder to gently grasp the back of my neck in a declaration of both tenderness and possession. Dean slowly angles his neck so that the opening of his mouth points straight at my eardrum. His breathing tickles me and I fight to suppress a shiver.

“Dane’s out back,” he whispers. I can feel the frown form on my face. Even as I try to force my two caterpillars to level out, they grow more tense and downturned. Dane is my least favorite of Dean’s dorm mates. He had lived in East Canton, Ohio with us before entering Kent State two years after me along with Dean and had never failed to piss me off in all that time. What a pig.

Even so, he is one of Dean’s best friends and a necessary nuisance, just not one I had been expecting today considering we both had an English class at 12:05. I was choosing to skip that lesson of pain since I had already missed a protest on Friday against the Vietnam War that Dean had said was one of the best experiences of his life. He pleaded, quite nearly on his hands and knees, to get me to come today. Dean also convinced me that no harm would be done. On Friday, guards had been within bayonet reach, yet no one even tried to cause serious suffering. Plus, today’s protest isn’t just against the war, but also the violation of our freedoms from the guards’ presence.

I’m not actually sure whether today’s protest is against the rules or not. Living off campus definitely has a downside called failure of communication. Of course, I’ve heard about the burning of the ROTC building on Saturday and the consequential guards on campus, along with many tales about the faculty being pissed at the student body. Even if we are breaking the rules, it means so much to Dean that attendance to this Monday extravaganza is essentially mandatory.

By the time I finish this thought, we turn the corner to spot the oh—so--charming Dane. “Beverly,” he snarls.

I glare back at him. He knows that I hate my full name. Even so, I conclude that he’s not worth my time and refuse to give him the satisfaction of acknowledgement, let alone a retort. “Be nice,” Dean murmurs, barely audibly into my hair.

The three of us quickly find stride and strut across campus. With the rush earlier, I failed to take the time to notice the strange atmosphere surrounding our school. Teachers and students alike hang around in clumps, speaking in hushed undertones and glancing suspiciously at passersby. Every so often one adult gains the courage to bark a command, only to be shushed by looks and sly comments from the peanut gallery.

I am uncomfortable and shrug ever closer to my Dean. He welcomes the shift and pulls me nearer in turn. Not only are the people eerie, but the weather seems to have followed suit. Along with the hushed voices, a misty cloud layer conquers the campus. Something feels off, but this is Ohio, the sun can always emerge at any moment.

As we finally arrive at the Commons, I experience shock at what I see. Thinking back to the last time I’d seen a clock, it could not be later than a quarter until noon and yet the mob that surrounds us was larger than I expected. There had to be around 500 people gathered around the Liberty Bell in the center of the grassy homeland. That wasn’t even mentioning the two thousand or so that are seen simply mingling around the edges, staring curiously at the center group.

I begin to worry. I do disagree with Nixon entering Cambodia to fight yet another person’s war; his reasons mentioned in his April 30th speech are as questionable as the rest of his campaign promises. Plus I’m no fonder than the next person of those intimidating guards on campus. They were called in by the governor over the weekend and their empty eyes and gas—masked faces are haunting. Even as I try my best to register, Dane wanders off without so much as a head nod goodbye and Dean joins the group in chant.

*“Pigs off campus. Pigs off campus.”* The screams are met with a simultaneous quickening of my heart. I search the premises for familiar faces or any signs of happiness. But everyone is focusing, screaming and fighting with a passion that I fail to understand. Signs insulting the president, the war, and the “man” fill my eager eyes.

I feel a weight lift from my neck as Dean forges forward towards the mass. I think he’s forgotten me, his pitiful, intimidated girlfriend, until he glances back and jerks his neck in a simple gesture of welcome. This is an experience for us together. His hand stretches backwards and I speed up to catch it before he disappears into the crowd.

*“Pigs off campus. Pigs off campus.”* The might of the voices start to mesh with the rest of me. I feel less terrified and more purposeful. These people are just like me, frustrated by the same issues. I know the difference between us is their bravery. While these people take the time to stand up for what they believe, I bow down to what I’m told.

A roar deafens me further as a Jeep swerves around the throng of bodies. One man has a loud speaker and is using it to read off an official sounding document.

“This rally is forbidden….choosing to stay will result in consequences….the United States of America…”

People join together in response. *“Pigs off campus. Pigs off campus,”* reaches a high with both number of voices and volume. I rasp the words through a dry mouth.

Dean finally pulls through the swarm to the front. I can see the Jeep and the bystanders. It dawns on me. I am not one of them. I am going to make a difference. My voice builds character, becoming louder and more certain.

Then I spot the group of National Guards, there have to be over a hundred of them. Each has a gas mask escorted by a threatening gun. They begin to walk our way and at first, no one moves. Then the majority backs away. The nameless and unknown tend to scare humanity, and since guards are both, people are terrified. Even as I try to shrink back, Dean holds my hand tighter.

The strength in him slowly spreads through my body and I feel inspiration fill me. That is, until a guard throws a tear gas canister. When the canister hits the ground, little actually happens. After the initial drawback, people start to force forward again and grab the canisters to chuck back at the guards. The guards, unlike us, don’t budge an inch. Instead they start to walk forward getting closer with each and every step. As each step of theirs moves forwards, ours move back. In this slow procession we make our way, leaving the Commons to head toward Blanket Hill.

As we give the guards power, they seem to absorb it. They seem to think they are the ones doing a service to their country. I am not so sure. Occasionally a particularly brave protestor takes a chance and throws a canister back at the Guards. With a strong wind blowing and gas masks, nothing particularly dangerous came from the tear gas. Instead it was a symbol. *I will not back down. I will not be silenced. I am not scared of you.*

We proceed backwards, the masses losing and guards gaining land as spectators begin to fade away. *“Pigs off campus. Pigs off campus,”* is still being chanted. But, as people lose hope, so too is the power in their voices lost. We reach gravel and I trip at the shift in terrain. I take a moment to look back; we have arrived at Prentice Hall and soon get stuck as our backs hit a building with nowhere to go.

While I get nervous, many people take this as motivation. Multiple individuals finally gain the strength to grab the canisters and throw them back, and when that doesn’t work: gravel is used. Dean, himself, reaches down to retrieve a handful of pebbles.

“Dean!” I gasp, shocked at his intensity.

“Come on babe, it’s not like I’m actually going to hit anyone,” throwing his shoulder back and through as I watch the rocks hurl toward the threat. “Come on,” he urges. “We should find Dane.”

We fight our way back through the crowd, this time getting farther away from the danger at hand. We soon spot Dane’s blonde streaks near a boy with a messy brown mop of hair and a brown Indian headband fighting to tame the beast. The boy has his middle fingers thrown up into the air, clearly absorbing the energy around him. The mess of bodies prevents us from actually reaching the couple and instead forces us to circle around behind. As we spin to double back towards the boys, we glance at the guards.

Suddenly, they decide to walk away. With their backs turned we are no longer within threatening distance. There had to be at least 150 feet between the front of our cluster and probably about 150 more feet before you reached us. Dean looks into my eyes.

“I’ll go grab Dane,” he says serenely. “Stay here, alright?”

The very most I can manage is the nod my head; I’m entranced by the masked mysteries. Dean plunges through the bodies. My heart skips a beat.

The soldiers stop moving. My first reflex is to reach down and pick up a rock, a weapon of mass destruction of my own sorts. As I raise my arm and begin to thrust the rock forward, I hear the first scream.

The soldiers are still standing, now fully facing us. Their guns are raised. A ring echoes through my ears as the sharp stone leaves my palm.

Chaos ensues. People hit the ground with the same amount of vigor they had in their voices minutes earlier, but I was frozen. Yells surround me, absorb me, and destroy me. I remember that I’m not here alone.

I scan ahead, searching desperately for the one person that really matters, yet no one emerges. Then I spot red and watch as a brown Indian headband falls to the ground along with the body of a male college student. The very one whose messy brown hair was finally freed from its constraints, but the fight inside him was now silenced.

I find the shag, along with the unsmiling mouth, and finally the rest of him. Dean is searching the crowd. I yell his name and his eyes finally land on me. I reach out my hand as he falls to the ground.

“Dean!” I scream. Hopelessly falling. My body jerks forward, fighting to find the pull that always brings us together. The attraction makes me strong and I flip him over even as blood pools below his left shoulder.

His eyes are slightly unfocused, yet his hand manages to find mine as our hearts follows suit. He grasps my hand firmly. He refuses to lose control, even in so much pain.

“Everything is going to be fine,” he says, though there is little emotion to be heard.

“Where does it hurt? What can I do?” I question. It feels like a dream. Nothing sinks in.

“I have a back injury,” he states apathetically. “I can’t feel either of my legs. What I need you to do is go find a telephone, can you do that? I need you to call my mom and tell her everything’s alright.” I bob my head as I fight back tears. This is no time for weakness.

“You’ll be…” I choke on the third word. Unable to ask what I really need to know. How this will shape our future.

“I’ll be fine, now go.”

The open fire had long since ceased, lasting less than fifteen seconds, but the madness continues. As I scan the area, I spot about twelve other bodies on the ground, some as far off as the tennis court. Dean is not the only one hurt right now, but he is the only one I need.

I rush into Prentice Hall pleading for a phone, and finally I grasp the electronic treasure. I only get through the phone number when the tears start to return. No. No. And I push them aside.

“Hello?” Mrs. Kahler answers the phone, her voice breezy as always. I try to speak but no words come out. “Hello?” she repeats, still patient, but a little uneasy. This time I push hard.

“Dean’s been shot,” as the words spill out so do some tears.

“Bev, is that you? Sweetie?” She’s in shock, maybe even more so than I am, but I really don’t have time.

“Dean’s been shot. And he wanted me to tell you that he’s going to be ok,” I catch a stranger by the arm as I end my sentence and say one word: help. He takes the phone from me and immediately starts explaining the situation in its entirety.

I am more grateful than I can ever express, but I have something else I need to do. My legs take control this time as they rush forward. When I reach the door, it takes me a moment to find Dean. The ground is still stained with his blood, but he’s been moved: on a stretcher heading towards an ambulance.

This time the sprint takes me over and I catch up before my heart can beat twice.

“I need…I need to go with him,” I stammer.

“Only family allowed, I’m afraid. Are you family?”

“Yes, yes! I’m his sister.” I climb into the vehicle after the stretcher only to overhear a few terrifying words from the paramedics’ mouths: paralyzed, waist, forever. I grasp Dean’s hand and think of what could have been our future before May 4, 1970. The ambulance doors close as we’re stuck in the blinking lights of his medical machines.

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Attribution of Research

The following facts were incoporated in the original paper turned in for this assignment.

1. "The Kent State University Shooting of 1970." *BBC - Homepage*. BBC News, 14 Sept. 2004. News. 14 Feb. 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A2773389>.
   * Protest Reaction to Nixon’s Troops to Cambodia
   * National Guards from previous protest
   * Students set fire to Reserve Officers Training Corps
   * Guardsmen were wearing gas masks
   * Student threw gas at guards
   * People started to leave
   * Guards fired 67 bullets in 13 seconds
   * 4 students killed and 9 injured, 13 total bodies on ground
2. Lewis, Jerry M., and Thomas R. Hensley. *The Ohio Council for the Social Studies Review*. 1st ed. Vol. 34. 1998. 9-21. *The May 4th Shootings at Kent State University: The Search for Historical Accuracy*. Magazine. 21 Feb. 2011. <http://dept.kent.edu/sociology/lewis/LEWIHEN.htm>.
   * May 4th was a Monday
   * Numbers of core demonstrators and spectators
   * Over 100 guards
   * Nixon’s speech on April 30, 1970
   * Protest focused on guard’s presence
   * War antisentiment among students, not adults
   * Protestors retreated from commons to Blanket Hill to Prentice Hall Parking Lot
   * Protest previous Friday and ROTC burned Saturday
   * Kahler shot from 300 feet away
   * Kahler was permanently paralyzed from the waist down
3. *May 4, 1970 Kent State Shootings*. *YouTube- Broadcast Yourself.* 2008. Web. 14 Feb. 2011. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-OmZvyNrzAs>.
   * Date- May 4, 1970
   * Commons was open meadow with sparse trees surrounded by parking lot and buildings
   * Liberty Bell in the center of commons
   * Shooting at Prentice Hall Parking lot
4. Michener, James A. *Kent State; What happened and Why.* 1st ed. New York: Random House, 1971. Print.
   * 12:05 english class during protest
   * Common chant was “Pigs off Campus”
   * Students did not expect violence
   * Sunday considered more scary because they were closer
   * 11:51 Jeep makes rounds reading the riot act
   * Jeff Miller wearing brown Indian headband the day he was shot
   * Miller was shot full in the face
   * Miller was there with friend Dane Griffin
   * Guards did not kneel
5. "The Secret Woman by Victoria Holt - Reviews, Discussion, Bookclubs, Lists." *Good Reads*. Web. 13 Mar. 2011. <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/817191.The\_Secret\_Woman>.
   * Top sold book in 1970
   * Anne Brett is heroine along with plot summary
6. "Then I Was Shot: Dean Kahler: Lost His Innocence." *The Burr | Kent State University*. Web. 22 Feb. 2011. <http://www.burr.kent.edu/archives/may4/shot/shot9.html>.
   * Kahler known for never being angry/bitter
   * Kahler’s hometown was East Canton, Ohio
   * Kahler went to Blanket Hill with dorm mates
   * Kahler threw handful of gravel from parking lot
   * In the future states” Obviously, I was not going to hit anybody” about gravel throw
   * Kahler had Boy Scouts background so he acknowledged/knew his injuries
   * Kahler shot below left shoulder
   * Kahler’s parents were called by a stranger before phone lines were cut
7. “Topshop Liberty Printed Dress." *Retro To Go*. 07 Mar. 2007. Web. 13 Mar. 2011. <http://www.retrotogo.com/2007/03/topshop\_liberty.html>.
   * Inspiration for dress
8. "1970 Economy/Prices" *1970s Flashback 1970 - 1979*. 2001. Web. 13 Mar. 2011. <http://www.1970sflashback.com/1970/Economy.asp>.
   * Estimated the price of coffee